

Subject: Allied Attitudes Towards the Strategic
Defense Initiative and US Development
of Anti-Satellite Weapons

Attached is a typescript memorandum on
Allied views on space weapons. I hope you will
find it useful.

Attachment

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20 June 1984

Allied Attitudes Towards the Strategic Defense Initiative and US Development of Anti-Satellite Weapons

Summary

US research programs on ballistic missile defense--the Strategic Defense Initiative--and the development of anti-satellite weapons are becoming a single, major issue in Western Europe. Many Allies, especially the INF basing countries, fear the negative publicity about space weapons could damage recent public relations gains that NATO has made on arms control and further erode domestic support for INF and other Alliance programs. NATO members are skeptical about the reliability and excessive costs of ballistic missile defense and maintain that US research will spur a new arms race. They fear that such US efforts will undermine Alliance doctrine and strategic planning, including the credibility of US nuclear protection of Western Europe. France and the UK believe that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) could threaten the deterrent value of their nuclear forces and jeopardize future modernization plans. On ASAT weapons, the Allies view US development and testing as a destabilizing step that may prompt Soviet-US competition to develop effective countermeasures.

As a result, many Allies are becoming increasingly vocal on outer space arms control. They have been discussing the topic among themselves, most recently at the meeting of

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Western European Union Foreign Ministers on 12 June. They may well believe that the approaching US Presidential elections allows them greater leverage to increase pressure on Washington to initiate arms control discussions on both anti-ballistic-missile and anti-satellite weapons. Currently, West Germany, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Canada, Italy and Norway support such talks. Paris on 12 June at the Geneva Conference on Disarmament called for negotiations leading to a ban on directed-energy defensive and offensive systems and on high-altitude ASAT weapons. Even the UK, customarily the closest to the US on arms control issues, wants negotiations on ballistic missile defense during the research phase and reportedly is considering support for limits on ASAT weapons.

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The Allies and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)

Most NATO members remain skeptical over the feasibility and desirability of a space and land-based ballistic missile defense (BMD). They are concerned over the political, military, and economic implications of systems now under consideration by the US. They especially are worried that the issue will become a major public relations problem for NATO.

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The systems comprising SDI would be designed to incapacitate enemy missiles in the liftoff, midcourse, and re-entry stages and could conceivably be used also as anti-satellite weapons. They could include:

- Space-based chemical lasers designed to destroy missiles shortly after liftoff.
- Ground-based lasers, utilizing sensors in space, to destroy missiles in the re-entry stage.
- A space-based, nuclear-generated, X-ray laser.
- A space-based, particle beam weapon.
- Kinetic-energy weapons such as interceptor missiles and "hyper-velocity guns," based on the ground or in space, to hit enemy warheads at midcourse or re-entry.

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- Microwave weapons using high frequencies to electronically disrupt enemy communications and targeting.

The Allies initially broadcast their reservations about the Strategic Defense Initiative immediately following the President's speech on March 23, 1983. Their negativism was caused, in part, by pique over the lack of consultations on the issue and the fact that the speech caught them by surprise. They were also concerned that the US chose to announce SDI when the controversy over initial deployments of NATO INF was building in Western Europe. In recent months, the Allies have voiced concern that US emphasis on space-based defensive weapons could undermine Western efforts to project an image of commitment to arms control in the wake of the INF controversy. The West European media, especially in West Germany and France, highlighted the successful US test this month of an ABM interceptor missile--along with the latest Soviet call for a ban on space weapons. [redacted]

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Despite extensive consultations with the US, many Allied governments continue to question certain facets of SDI. These reservations echo those now being debated within the US scientific community and in the US and West European media: is such a defense system affordable, is it workable, and will it create strategic instability by fostering both an offensive and defensive arms race between the US and the USSR? Virtually all NATO members fear the impact of BMD on Alliance doctrine and strategic planning, and many maintain that even a partial defense system could undermine the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella by allowing the US to "decouple" itself from Europe in time of war. For example, Italian officials have indicated that the US could be perceived as abandoning its Allies after forcing them to accept INF. French, Dutch and West German foreign office and defense officials have emphasized that the SDI could eventually decouple Western Europe from the US if protection was not fully extended to Europe. [redacted]

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Allied officials also say that the US publicly is adding credence to Soviet charges that it is preparing for a pre-emptive first strike capability. In addition, they are dubious about the ability to defend against tactical nuclear and short-range weapons. West German, French, and Dutch defense officials have voiced particular concern about this aspect. Allied officials, moreover, maintain that BMD weapons can have anti-satellite capability, and French, Dutch, and Italian officials have stressed this linkage. The West Germans and French publicly--and other Allies privately--are counseling the US to to open discussions with the Soviets on BMD, and are also stressing that the US should take care not to abrogate or undermine the 1972 ABM treaty. [redacted]

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Views on ASAT Weapons

Several Allies, believing that their publics as well as many non-aligned countries are receptive to Soviet criticism of the West on arms control in outer space, have urged the US not only to begin negotiations on space-based defense, but to resume talks on ASAT weapons.¹ Especially the UK and France have pointed out that current US efforts on ASAT weapons will only spark an arms race with the USSR. Many Allies also have voiced concern that such arms competition would inevitably lead to the adoption of countermeasures that would encourage development of more advanced offensive systems.² Allied officials accept US evidence of current Soviet ASAT capabilities, but some argue that the present Soviet ASAT system is rudimentary.³ Italian officials contend, for example, that an arms control agreement could forestall Soviet and US development of effective systems by the end of the decade, while Dutch officials observe that the US has the capability quickly to eclipse Soviet technological advances. Moreover, the West European media generally have ignored Soviet capabilities while complaining of US activities in this area. []

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¹Since the early 1960s, the US and USSR have subscribed to a number of treaties and agreements that deal with the military use of outer space. (See Appendix). Taken as a whole, these pacts prohibit such activities as deployment of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in orbits around the earth, on celestial bodies, or stationed in outer space in any other manner. On celestial bodies, they also prohibit creation of military bases and fortifications, testing any type of weapon and conducting military activities. In addition, several of these agreements focus on non-interference with satellite communications. []

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²Examples of countermeasures include an ASAT attack warning system, hardening satellites against shock or nuclear effects, enhancing their ability to maneuver, and the orbiting of "silent spares"--satellites that can be activated to replace operational systems. []

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³The existing Soviet ASAT system is a conventional interceptor launched by a version of the SS-9 ICBM into a co-orbit with the target satellite. []

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External Pressure on the Allies

Aggressive Soviet promotion of its positions on arms control in outer space greatly concerns many NATO allies.* The INF basing countries in particular are worried over Soviet success at the United Nations and at the UN Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva in exploiting the concern of many non-aligned nations about an arms race. Some of these non-aligned nations are seeking new legal and regulatory mechanisms through the UN to control the militarization of outer space and to ban any activities in space that might threaten their interests. [REDACTED]

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NATO countries have remained united at the UN in insisting that any international discussion of arms control issues be conducted at the CD. However, when both the East and Neutrals last fall advanced a UN resolution calling for negotiations on outer space arms control, the Allies abandoned the US to vote for the resolution, except for the UK, which abstained. At the CD, the Allies until now have reluctantly supported the US position that the mandate of the CD's working group on outer space be limited to discussion of, but not negotiation on, arms control agreements. But France's proposal at Geneva for negotiations limiting space weapons effectively has broken the appearance of Allied unity on this issue, and other NATO members of the Western Group in the CD (the UK, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Canada) may endorse multilateral negotiations in that forum. [REDACTED]

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Current Positions of Key Allies

France, West Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, and Canada have all been vocal in their concerns about US plans for BMD. Paris and London are concerned over the implications of BMD for NATO and its deterrent strategy as well as over the prospect of a US-Soviet monopoly of such new systems. All but the UK have also supported a ban on high-altitude ASATs, and London reportedly is reassessing its position. [REDACTED]

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France

The comments of French officials to the US privately and in recent NATO deliberations have mirrored the criticisms of other

*The Soviets last year at the UN tabled a new draft treaty that prohibits testing and deployments of space-based weapons, testing and military use of piloted space craft and new ASAT systems. It also calls for elimination of existing systems and provides for verification by national means. [REDACTED]

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Allies. However, they also strongly contend that Soviet competition with the US in the development of BMD could threaten the deterrent value of existing and modernized French strategic forces, strip Western Europe of US nuclear protection, and lead to serious acrimony within NATO. For these reasons, French defense officials say they favor negotiations to limit development of these systems. Indeed, France on 12 June proposed at the CD that the US and USSR agree to multilateral talks on banning energy-directed anti-ballistic and anti-satellite weapons and strictly limiting high-altitude ASAT weapons. Paris, like other Allies, wants the US to exhibit more flexibility towards space arms control at the CD. French officials, moreover, say the US should be more "consistent" in its public statements on SDI in particular and not stress imminent success of research efforts. [REDACTED]

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At the same time, France apparently believes it must now consider developing its own strategic defense capability to protect its forces and to ensure that the US and USSR do not gain a monopoly on defensive systems. Moreover, the French may be concerned that through SDI, the US eventually will take the lead in industrial development of the new technologies involved at the expense of France and Western Europe. Defense Minister Hernu in mid-March claimed that President Mitterrand is thinking of forming a special commission of leading French scientists and strategists to investigate the development of a French system using technologies similar to those under consideration by the US. [REDACTED]

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West Germany

Bonn, for the sake of public opinion, wants to be perceived as strongly favoring both US-Soviet and multilateral negotiations on arms control in space. West German officials say they are sympathetic to the French proposal on space weapons at the CD. Foreign Minister Genscher recently called publicly for "precautionary" arms control talks on new defensive systems while they are in the research stage. According to West German officials, Bonn also favors a ban on high-altitude ASATs that is monitored by specific verification procedures. The agreement would allow the US and USSR to have one system each in a low orbit. [REDACTED]

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Woerner and other top West German officials, have also aired these concerns publicly in an attempt to distance the Kohl government from the US on the BMD issue. In early April, Woerner observed in a widely--disseminated interview that he understood US desires to catch up to the Soviets on space research, but believed that US-Soviet competition could destabilize the East-West balance and split the Alliance. Woerner noted that reasonable disarmament agreements were better than a new and costly rearmament. His views were echoed subsequently in the West German press by the government spokesman and by CSU leader Strauss. The opposition Social Democrats, meanwhile, charged that US research and development of defensive and ASAT weapons would seriously harm West German-US relations and called on the Kohl government to emphasize to the US the need to avoid a new arms race. [REDACTED]

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United Kingdom

British officials have privately stressed London's numerous reservations on the Strategic Defense Initiative, particularly the potential expense involved and the ramifications for NATO strategy. London also has expressed concern that the successful US demonstration of ballistic missile defense on 10 June could be seen as a violation of the ABM treaty. The British, like the French, also are greatly concerned about the impact of BMD on the government's public justifications for INF, on the already controversial Trident program, and on other nuclear modernization programs. Defense Minister Heseltine has suggested that NATO consider arms control alternatives in this area. [REDACTED]

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On other outer space issues, the Thatcher government generally has been closest to US positions, but British officials are warning that this may change. They say the UK is sympathetic to the "substance" of the French proposal at the CD, and London reportedly is considering support for a partial ban on ASAT weapons. [REDACTED]

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The Netherlands

The Dutch have been outspoken in expressing their concerns in Allied discussions on the Strategic Defense Initiative. They also have actively sought support within the Alliance in recent months for negotiations on ASAT weapons. Dutch officials have joined their British and West German counterparts in voicing sympathy with the French proposal at the CD. The Hague fears that the current public discussion of potential US defensive and offensive weapons in space will heighten the skepticism about the US commitment to arms control already widespread in the Netherlands in connection with INF. Dutch defense and foreign ministry officials recently noted that West Europeans perceive SDI as part of a major change in US strategic thinking, and that it could lead to further US-European "estrangement." They pointed out that the Dutch Parliament in February adopted a "sweeping" motion sponsored by the opposition Labor party calling for the Netherlands to urge the US and USSR to negotiate bilateral and multilateral bans on the development and testing of space weapons. [REDACTED]

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Within the Alliance, the Netherlands has proposed three alternative bans on ASAT weapons: on all existing and future systems, only on future systems, or on high-altitude systems only. The Dutch in NATO discussions have said they are encouraged by signs that the US is considering a partial prohibition of ASAT weapons. [REDACTED]

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Canada

Ottawa for some time has been pushing for a ban on testing and deployment of high-altitude ASAT weapons. Negotiations on space weapons is a key part of Prime Minister Trudeau's proposals for strategic stability, and Canada has used discussions of the Trudeau Initiative to stimulate Allied interest in arms control and put pressure on the US. The Canadians have agreed, however, not to present their ASAT proposal at the CD pending further discussions with US officials. Canada recently publicly rejected Soviet allegations that Ottawa's interest in arms control had flagged since Trudeau announced his impending resignation, claiming that it will push for a ban on high-altitude ASAT weapons despite US opposition. Canada has circulated within NATO a lengthy paper drafted by its embassy in Moscow outlining "clear" Soviet concerns about SDI and US development of ASAT weapons. The paper concludes that Moscow may be receptive to discussions in these areas next year. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

US plans for research on BMD and development of ASAT weapons, and its position on arms control of space weapons, almost certainly will be a major topic within the Alliance in the months ahead. The Allies will escalate pressure for arms control dialogue between the USSR and the US on ballistic missile defense and a limited ban on ASAT weapons. At the same time, many will press for multilateral talks on arms control in outer space in the Conference on Disarmament. [redacted]

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Beyond this, the Allies almost certainly will hope that they can discourage the US from publicly highlighting SDI and at least to influence US thinking on the issue in ways that will protect their interests. They thus will continue to air their concerns privately and publicly both toward this end and to ensure that the US keeps them informed. [redacted]

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There are indications that Mitterrand and Kohl especially hope to exploit growing Allied interest in greater European defense cooperation in order to enhance coordination among the major Allies on arms control issues, and thereby increase their leverage on the US. France, for example, is proposing that the Agency for Control of Armaments of the Western European Union (WEU) be restructured to provide a forum for discussion of arms control issues and to deal with verification of agreements. [redacted]

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[redacted] Significantly, foreign ministers of the seven WEU members agreed at their meeting on 12 June that the WEU could be used as a forum to discuss arms control issues, including space weapons. [redacted]

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Appendix
Agreements or Treaties Involving Arms Control in
Outer Space and BMD

- The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963.
- The Outer Space Treaty of 1967.
- Agreement on Measures to Reduce Risk of Nuclear War of 1971.
- The Hot-Line Modernization Agreement of 1971.
- Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects of 1972.
- The ABM Treaty of 1972.
- The SALT I Agreement of 1972.
- The Convention on Registration of Objects Launched Into Outer Space of 1975.
- SALT II, signed in June 1979, but not ratified.
- Environmental Modification Convention of 1980.

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